



STATE OF LOUISIANA  
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HOSPITALS

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Kathleen Babineaux Blanco  
GOVERNOR

Fred P. Cerise, M.D., M.P.H.  
SECRETARY

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## INFO SHEET: ARSENIC AND PRIVATE WELLS

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Arsenic is a naturally occurring element in rocks, soil, water, air, plants, and animals. It can be further released into the environment through natural activities such as volcanic action, erosion of rocks, and forest fires, or as a result of a variety of human activities. Approximately 90 percent of industrial arsenic in the U.S. is currently used as a wood preservative, but arsenic is also used in paints, dyes, metals, drugs, soaps, and semi-conductors. Agricultural application, mining, and smelting also contribute to arsenic releases in the environment.

Higher levels of arsenic tend to be found more in ground water sources than in surface water sources (i.e., lakes and rivers) of drinking water. As a result, there may be geographic "hot spots" with wells that may have higher levels of arsenic than the predicted occurrence for that area.

Therefore, persons that own a private well should take steps to ensure that their water is safe to drink. Although the Safe Drinking Water Program (SDWP), under the Office of Public Health, does not monitor or regulate private wells, this office strongly recommends that private wells be tested for contaminants including, but not limited to, nitrate, coliform bacteria, and arsenic to detect problems early. Annual testing should occur if a problem is suspected.

Most people do not need to treat their drinking water at home to make it safe to drink. However, many people on private wells, especially those more vulnerable to the effects of waterborne illness, find it desirable to have that added level of protection that a home drinking water treatment unit may provide. Consumers who choose to purchase a home water treatment unit should carefully read its product information to understand what they are buying, whether it is for a better taste or a certain method of treatment. Also, consumers should strictly adhere to the manufacturer's instructions for operation and maintenance, especially changing of the filter on a regular basis. Additionally, it is important to remember that no single unit can remove every kind of drinking water contaminant; the consumer must decide which type best meets his/her needs.

The LDHH-OPH Safe Drinking Water Program neither endorses nor recommends specific home water treatment units. However, for assistance in choosing a unit, consumers are encouraged to contact one of the following independent non-profit organizations: NSF International (877-8-NSF-HELP), the Underwriters Laboratories (888-852-3638), and the Water Quality Association (630-505-0160). Both NSF International and Underwriters Laboratories Inc. test and certify home water treatment units. The Water Quality Association classifies units according to the contaminants they remove as well as listing units that have earned their "Gold Seal" approval. Certification by these organizations will be indicated on their packaging or labels.